

SMART Goal Setting

Setting goals or resolutions at the start of the New Year is a cultural norm. We've all found ourselves saying "this year I'm going to do 'x'" or "by 'June' I'll have achieved 'y'." But often, many of us find that despite our best efforts, we are unable to stick to them. In fact, research tells us that without specificity and reasonability, our goals are unlikely to be achieved. That's where the goal setting framework, known as SMART, comes in. This acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound. This system is relatively easy to remember and use and it has been successful in numerous settings (Chang, Chou, Teherani & Hauer, 2011). So, without further ado let's go over each step of this proven goal setting method:

S: Specific

When setting a goal, it is important to be specific about what we would like to achieve. Broad, generalised goals can be difficult to reach, for example: "I want to be better at sports" is very broad and general. Does this mean all sports, or just one or two? Does it mean being a better teammate? Perhaps try to rephrase this goal as "I would like to be a better putter when golfing this Summer". This goal is specific and specific goals are easier to measure to keep track of success, which brings us to....

M: Measurable

When we consistently measure our goals, we are able to see the changes and growth. For example, if our goal was to reduce our alcohol intake, we could just make the effort week in week out to have less alcohol, but that's not very specific and perhaps difficult to keep track of. Ensuring your goals are measurable, means it's easier to keep progressing. For example, let's say you know that, on average, you drink about 10 alcoholic drinks every week. Try rephrasing the goal as follows: "Instead of having 10 drinks weekly, I will reduce my weekly alcoholic drinks by 2". By keeping track and making the goal measurable, you can ensure you are continually progressing and tracking the number will help keep you accountable. Also, ensuring goals are measurable can assist with setting goals that are achievable.

A: Achievable

A common pitfall when setting goals is setting a goal that is difficult or unlikely to be achieved. For example, the goal of becoming an elite athlete is an admirable goal to have, however, in reality, elite athletes make up a very small portion of the population. This is not to say that it could never be achieved, but the likelihood is slim. People can often become disheartened when they don't reach or achieve their goals, this is often due to the goals being unrealistic. By ensuring that your goals are actually achievable, you are more likely to push yourself to meet them. Breaking down a larger goal into achievable, smaller goals can help too. You might want to start with "I'd like to win the local golf competition this Summer" rather than "I want to be the next Tiger Woods".

R: Relevant

It's important to examine your goals and decide whether they are in line with your values, desires and long-term goals. For example, "attending the gym regularly" when you really don't enjoy going to the gym, isn't a relevant goal to achieving your larger goal of "improving my fitness so that I can run the half marathon in October". You might perhaps enjoy going for a run, or a walk with a friend or by yourself twice a week, to increase your fitness. These goals are equally as health promoting, but are more in line with your interests, values and desires. If a goal isn't relevant to your values or long-term goals, it's worth rethinking it.

T: Time Bound

Another common pitfall when goal setting, is either having no timeframe, or setting an unrealistic and unachievable time frame. For example: saving \$20,000 is not an unrealistic goal, but saving \$20,000 in a week however, is. Ensuring that your goal has a realistic time frame can make it easier to strive towards the goal, and keep you motivated. Setting macro and micro goals can be helpful too. With macro being an overarching goal, and micro goals being smaller milestones within that goal. A common method of setting these is having a 3, 6 and 9 month micro goals, to reach your 12 month macro goal. For example, instead of just saying I want to save \$20,000 in a year, you could break the large (macro) goal down into smaller (micro) ones, with milestones to meet and celebrate along the way. You could rephrase the goal as follows "In 3 months I'd like to have saved \$5,000, in 6 months I'd like to have \$10,000 in my savings account. Then in 12 months I'd like to have saved \$20,000". By setting micro goals, you can assist in keeping yourself accountable and motivated. Make sure you celebrate your success along the way, rather than just at the end. Plus, if for some reason you met your 3 and 6 month goals, but not your 12 month goal, you can celebrate the fact you have saved money consistently for a time period. Then you can set a new goal of reaching \$20,000, with a different time frame.

E: Evaluate and R: Readjust

Sometimes it can be helpful to add ER to your SMART goals, to make them SMARTER! See what we did there?! It's important to make sure your goal setting works for you. If you've used the SMART goal setting approach but still haven't managed to reach your goal, then it's important to evaluate the goal and readjust it to work better for you.

We wish you every success in reaching your goals for 2021 and beyond. However, if you're struggling to work through your life goals or if you're needing a little bit of extra support at any time of the year, please phone The Anna Centre on [\(03\) 5442 5066](tel:0354425066) or email at admin@annacentre.com.au to book an appointment with one of our mental health specialists. Please be advised that The Anna Centre is not a crisis or emergency support service, please ring Bendigo Health Psychiatric Triage on [1300 363 788](tel:1300363788) or your local psychiatric triage in times of crisis.

Happy New Year & Happy Goal Setting!

From The Anna Centre